

Bill T. Jones / Arnie Zane and Company

Art, Life and the Politics Of The Possible

By Joseph Fedrowitz

Bill T. Jones / Arnie Zane and Company are not your typical looking dance company, with all the bodies appearing as if they were cast from the same mold and of the same color. They are black and white, brown and yellow, short and tall, fat and skinny. Nor do they present your typical dance fare. Their work is intended to confront an audience's preconceptions about dance, gender and sexuality, about what is accepted on the stage and even what is accepted in life.

These intentions are a reflection of the lives and personal looks of the company's founders. Bill T. Jones is tall, graceful and black. Arnie Zane was short, abrupt in movement Jewish and white. In 1971, Bill and Arnie became lovers and began their long collaboration as dancers and choreographers. In 1982, they formed their company, which now consists of 10 dancers. Arnie died last March of complications due to AIDS.

For the second year in a row, this New York based company will open the six week long, world renowned American Dance Festival (ADF) held in Durham. Last year, the Festival was dedicated to the memory of Arnie and two other ADF associated dancers, Lee Conner and Alvin McDuffie, both of whom had also recently died due to AIDS. This year, the June 14th performance of Bill T. Jones / Arnie Zane and Company will be a benefit for The AIDS Service Project (TASP) of the Lesbian and Gay Health Project. Of the normal ticket price of \$15, ADF will donate \$5 from each ticket bought through TASP or Triangle Black and White Men Together.

You may also purchase a benefit ticket at the box office the night of the performance, but you must mention that it is for the TASP benefit.

Although in no sense can they be pigeon-holed as a "gay dance company," Bill and Arnie have never hidden who they were. Their pride in themselves and their lives together is reflected in their work. Bill has said, "By our very nature, we represent subversive elements." Arnie felt, "Being a gay man living in a dominant white culture in an interracial relationship are all terms which make me cringe, but are used to get ideas across."

To gain a better understanding of these ideas, I spoke with Bill by telephone.

Joseph: "What has the company meant to you and Arnie?"

Bill: "This company is the child that Arnie and I had. In terms of unions, that's some product. And now I face the responsibilities of a single parent. There's no guidebook for that. In one sense, Arnie and I had a very exclusive relationship. We would spend hours ramming heads together discussing and arguing over our work. We ate three meals a day together and slept in the same bed every night. And now I can't turn to him in the middle of the night to go over some new idea or problem."

J: "How do you all get along in the company, personally and professionally?"

B: "We're very tight. Many of the members have friendships well beyond the workplace. Because of our problems (i.e. Arnie's death), there has been a greater commitment. And the company wants more in consequence, more input."

(Arthur Aviles, a company member, has said, continued on following page



Bill T. Jones / Arnie Zane and Company: "D-Man in the Waters," a work to be performed at the American Dance Festival this month.

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